




2002

# Battle for Peace in Sudan: An Analysis of the Abuja Conferences, 1992-1993 [Review]

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## Recommended Citation

Sharkey, H. J. (2002). Battle for Peace in Sudan: An Analysis of the Abuja Conferences, 1992-1993 [Review]. *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 36 (1), 101-102. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/nelc\\_papers/2](http://repository.upenn.edu/nelc_papers/2)

Heather J. Sharkey's review of *Battle for Peace in Sudan: An Analysis of the Abuja Conferences, 1992-1993* by Steven Wöndu and Ann Lesch.  
At the time of publication, author Heather Sharkey was affiliated with Trinity College. Currently, she is a faculty member at the at the University of Pennsylvania.

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# Battle for Peace in Sudan: An Analysis of the Abuja Conferences, 1992-1993 [Review]

## Abstract

In 1992, in an effort to end the Sudanese civil war, President Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria offered to sponsor peace talks between the Sudanese government (dominated by the National Islamic Front), and the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Held in the Nigerian capital of Abuja in 1992 and 1993, the talks ultimately ended in failure, allowing one of the world's long est and deadliest conflicts to continue unabated. *Battle for Peace in Sudan* is a fascinating study of these negotiations, written by Wöndu, who served as official notetaker of the SPLM delegation, and Lesch, a political scientist and Sudan specialist. The book should be required reading for anyone interested in the religious dynamics of the second Sudanese civil war, the start of which, in 1983, coincided with the regime's introduction of Shari'a hudud laws. This assertion of Islamic law, which grew stronger after 1989, antagonized the predominantly non-Muslim southern Sudanese population, and added to longstanding grievances about the country's grossly unequal regional distribution of political power and wealth.

## Disciplines

African History | Islamic World and Near East History | Near and Middle Eastern Studies

## Comments

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**Battle for Peace in Sudan: An Analysis of the Abuja Conferences, 1992-1993**, by STEVEN WÖNDU and ANN LESCH. 247 pages, index, maps, photographs, appendices. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000. \$52.50 (Cloth) ISBN 0-7618-1516-3

In 1992, in an effort to end the Sudanese civil war, President Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria offered to sponsor peace talks between the Sudanese government (dominated by the National Islamic Front), and the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Held in the Nigerian capital of Abuja in 1992 and 1993, the talks ultimately ended in failure, allowing one of the world's longest and deadliest conflicts to continue unabated. *Battle for Peace in Sudan* is a fascinating study of these negotiations, written by Wöndu, who served as official notetaker of the SPLM delegation, and Lesch, a political scientist and Sudan specialist. The book should be required reading for anyone interested in the religious dynamics of the second Sudanese civil war, the start of which, in 1983, coincided with the regime's introduction of Shari'a *hudud* laws. This assertion of Islamic law, which grew stronger after 1989, antagonized the predominantly non-Muslim southern Sudanese population, and added to longstanding grievances about the country's grossly unequal regional distribution of political power and wealth.

At Abuja, disagreements over religion and state thwarted conflict resolution. Sudan government delegates insisted that the country was and had to be an Islamic Arabophone state, since Islam was the majority religion (70 percent) and Arabic the plurality language (40 percent). SPLM delegates maintained, on the contrary, that the Sudan had to be a secular, multicultural state if it were to survive within extant borders, and protested the agenda of successive postcolonial, northern-dominated regimes to propagate Arabic and Islam.

The SPLM came to Abuja in 1992 weakened by a schism over the viability and desirability of unity or secession. Whereas its mainstream branch accepted, in theory, the continuation of the unitary territorial state, provided that the government affirmed a commitment to secularism as well as to regional power-sharing, a splinter group insisted that differences with the regime were irreconcilable and that a North-South divorce should occur.

The Nigerian conference hosts thought that their country had lessons to offer. Like Sudan, Nigeria had struggled after independence to overcome potential northern-southern, Muslim-Christian divisions, and had even fought a civil war, the Biafran War (1967-70). After Biafra, Nigerian leaders sought to reunite the country by redrawing internal boundaries, devolving greater authority upon smaller regional states, and devising power-sharing mechanisms within the army and central government. Significantly, they also declared Nigeria a secular state: no religious group would dominate. At Abuja, SPLM delegates welcomed suggestions to model a post-war Sudan on the Nigerian model, but Sudan government delegates rejected the model outright.

Since independence, the Sudan government has had something of a colonial relationship to its southern regions. It has promoted a 'civilizing mission' based on Arabic and Islam, and, like a textbook Marxist-Leninist example of imperialist predation, has tried to extract southern natural resources—above all water, and now, increasingly, oil—to benefit Khartoum. Not surprisingly, where so much wealth and culture is at stake, none of the warring parties has yielded.

Since 1983, therefore, Sudanese (overwhelmingly southerners) have died in the hundreds of thousands. Like many other attempted peace initiatives, the Abuja talks failed to end the war. *Battle for Peace in Sudan* helps to explain why, by illuminating the profound ideological rifts that have made the conflict so intractable.

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## Economics

**The Economy of Iran: The Dilemmas of an Islamic State**, edited by PARVIN ALIZADEH. 303 pages, bibliography, index. New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2001. \$65.00 (Cloth) ISBN 1-86064-464-3

*The Economy of Iran* is a collection of eight papers on the economic development in Iran since the Islamic Revolution. It is a welcome addition to the literature on the Iranian economy, particularly because economics research on Iran remains notably limited. All three papers in part one make an attempt to explain the rise and decline of growth in the early 1990s. They show that during 1989-91, increased oil revenues and economic liberalization, which permitted large foreign borrowing, helped the economy recover from the macroeconomic difficulties that it had experienced in the 1980s as a result of the Revolution and war. The three papers further agree that the growth episode was short-lived and ended in a major balance-of-payments crisis after 1993 because of poor macroeconomic policies. The first two papers—one authored by Hassan Hakimian and Massoud Karshenas and the other by Hashem Pesaran—emphasize the role of special interests and the incompetence of policymakers in the government's failure to pursue more effective policies. In contrast, the third paper, authored by Sohrab Behdad, suggests that the policy choices were the consequences of the revolutionary politicians' preference for politically expedient tactics and the prevalence of populist ideologies among them. The difference between the two approaches is significant because the analyses of the first two papers imply that better policies will come about when the powers of special interests are curbed and policymaking take better advantage of expertise. In contrast, Behdad concludes that economic policies in Iran will not be conducive to growth as long as the political leaders lack a coherent vision of their regime and fail to establish a 'pax Islamicus' in ways that the Umayyad and Abbasids did after the revolutionary rise of Islam thirteen centuries ago. These three papers offer important information and assessments, but also suffer from weaknesses. For example, Pesaran's paper has an econometric section which is rather preliminary and not as good as his usual first-rate work. Another example is a discussion in Behdad's paper on foreign exchange policy, which contradicts itself.

In part two, Suzanne Maloney provides a well-researched account of the Islamic Foundations (*Bonyads*), which are large public business conglomerates under the control of the Supreme Leader, independent from the government,, and also important agents of rent redistribution with political agendas and strong connections. Maloney shows that *Bonyads* play complex roles in the economy,